



YEAR OF CLEAN WATER

Water Education Weekly Drops

Week Four

Estuaries

What does our Estuary Program do?

The National Estuary Program (NEP) was established in 1987 by amendments to the Clean Water Act to identify, restore, and protect nationally significant estuaries of the United States. Unlike traditional regulatory approaches to environmental protection, the NEP targets a broad range of issues and engages local communities in the process. The program focuses not just on improving water quality in an estuary, but on maintaining the integrity of the whole system -- its chemical, physical, and biological properties, as well as its economic, recreational, and aesthetic values.

The National Estuary Program is designed to encourage local communities to take responsibility for managing their own estuaries. Each NEP is made up of representatives from federal, state and local government agencies responsible for managing the estuary's resources, as well as members of the community -- citizens, business leaders, educators, and researchers. These stakeholders work together to identify problems in the estuary, develop specific actions to address those problems, and create and implement a formal management plan to restore and protect the estuary.

Twenty-eight estuary programs are currently working to safeguard the health of some of our Nation's most important coastal waters. Region III has four Estuary Programs: the Delaware Inland Bays, Maryland Coastal Bays

1. What is an estuary and why are they important?

- 2. In what estuary do most EPA employees reside?**
- 3. Why is the Delaware Estuary so important to us?**
- 4. What is the largest tributary of the Delaware River**

Answers:

- 1. What is an estuary and why are they important?**(remember from Week Two)

A. Estuaries are areas where the fresh water of a river meets and mixes with the salt water of the ocean. Estuaries are among the most productive habitats on earth and are vital spawning, nursery and feeding grounds for fish and wildlife. They also support wading and migratory birds, reptiles and mammals. Estuary wetlands filter pollutants and sediments from the land and serve as buffers that protect land from flooding and erosion.

- 2. In what estuary do most Region III employees reside?**

A. The Delaware Estuary.

The DE Estuary includes portions of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware and stretches approximately 133 miles from the falls of the Delaware River at Trenton, NJ and Morrisville, PA south to the mouth of the Delaware Bay between Cape May, NJ and Cape Henlopen, DE.

- 3. Why is the Delaware Estuary so important to us?**

A. The transition from land to sea, and from fresh to salt water, creates one of the most productive habitats on earth. The Estuary is home to the largest population of horse shoe crabs in the world, and is an integral link in the migratory path of numerous species of birds, including shorebirds and waterfowl. The Estuary provides vital spawning, nursery, and feeding grounds for fish, shellfish, and marine mammals. It supports wading and migratory birds, reptiles, and mammals, and serves as a source of drinking water. The Estuary filters pollutants and sediments from the land and acts as a buffer that provides protection from flooding and erosion. The estuary supports a diverse natural environment, as well as a vital industrial base.

The Delaware Estuary contributes significantly to the economic, recreational, and cultural resources of the region. In addition to its natural beauty and habitat value, the Estuary maintains the world's largest fresh water port, the second largest refining-petrochemical center in the nation, and one of the world's greatest concentrations of heavy industry. These diverse uses require a delicate balance. The Delaware Estuary Program is committed to improving and maintaining the state of the

environment in the Delaware Estuary

4 What is the largest tributary of the Delaware River?

A. The largest tributary to the DE Estuary is the Schuylkill River.

For further information: <http://www.epa.gov/nep/>

or call the Region III Estuary Coordinators:

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(Look for a future Water Drops to learn more about the CPB)